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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 006638

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PARM](#) [PTER](#) [TBIO](#) [MNUC](#) [XF](#) [IR](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: CHINESE IRAN EXPERT SAYS PRC SEEKING OPPORTUNITIES  
FOR MEDIATING ROLE IN NUCLEAR CRISIS

REF: BEIJING 05902

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. Daniel Piccuta,  
for reasons 1.4 (b, d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: In an October 11 People's Daily report, China's former ambassador to Iran suggested the Six-Party Talks model could be applied to the Iran nuclear issue but that the United States would have to negotiate directly with Iran. A Chinese researcher claimed to PolOff that Beijing is seeking opportunities to play the role of mediator in the crisis over Iran's nuclear program, should the right conditions emerge. The scholar reiterated China's opposition to sanctions, but said China has been urging Iran to show flexibility and genuine cooperation with the IAEA. However, he said that Beijing is also concerned that the "rights" of Iran be respected. END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) With recent news of progress in the Six-Party Talks on the North Korea nuclear issue, the Chinese official press has highlighted the possibility of using the Six-Party Talks model as a way forward on the Iran nuclear problem. On the front page of the October 11 overseas edition of the CCP-affiliated People's Daily, former Chinese Ambassador to Iran Hua Liming suggested that the Six-Party Talks model could be applied the Iran case, but stressed that the United States would have to show more flexibility, especially in accepting direct negotiation with Iran. Hua asserted that the ultimate goal of the United States is regime change in Iran, and fears the U.S. has already dismissed the effectiveness of negotiation and will rely on sanctions and, if necessary, military force.

¶3. (C) Reftel outlined the debate within China policy circles on how to deal with Iran, including Hua's position that the Iran nuclear situation represents a strategic opportunity for Chinese diplomatic intervention. In a recent conversation with PolOff, Li Guofu, Director of the Center for Middle East Studies at the MFA-affiliated China Institute for International Studies (CIIS), detailed his belief that China is interested in playing an intermediary role in the conflict, but only if the right conditions emerge. (Note: Li, who visited Iran this summer, is a well-known establishment figure in the Chinese academic world with close ties to the Foreign Ministry and receives a stipend from the State Council in recognition of his "exceptional contributions.")

China as intermediary?

¶4. (C) Beijing increasingly believes it has the potential to act as mediator in the conflict between the United States and Iran over Iran's nuclear program and is stepping up efforts to push both sides for dialogue, Li claimed. Li said the concept put forth by Ambassador Hua (reftel) (i.e., that the

crisis represents a strategic opportunity for China to play a more active role in the Middle East) is increasingly the "mainstream" approach at the MFA. Beijing, according to Li, can support any deal to which both Iran and the EU can agree and is thus well placed to mediate. Li said that the Iran nuclear issue is a dilemma for the PRC, which aims to maintain good relations with both Iran and the West, claiming that PRC policy-makers are "waiting for an opportunity to take initiative to provide the needed framework" to resolve the crisis.

15. (C) However, Li asserted, China is not yet ready to risk its credibility and directly mediate the conflict without indications from both sides that they are willing to compromise. China's view is that when Iran shows flexibility, as it did with the IAEA Plan of Action, it should see rewards as an incentive to continue cooperation. Li claimed to have raised the concept of Chinese intervention on the nuclear issue with official contacts in Iran during his visit earlier in the year and reported that they expressed willingness for China to play such a role. Li added that he told his Iranian contacts that they would need to show readiness to make concessions in order to see progress, stressing that the PRC would expect "new ideas" from Iran on how to resolve the crisis. Li added that Beijing would want to see signs of increased willingness to compromise from the United States and the EU before proposing a formal framework.

Beijing to Iran: Be cooperative  
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16. (C) Beijing, Li claimed, does not believe that past

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sanctions have had any influence over Iran's behavior, and future ones would similarly fail. Rather, Li reported, Chinese diplomats have told their Iranian counterparts that previous rounds of sanctions are best seen as a demonstration of the seriousness with which the international community takes the issue. They have urged the Iranians to show flexibility and sincere cooperation with the IAEA. According to Li, Beijing perceives that the United States has shown increased flexibility on the issue, which Beijing believes strengthens its hand when urging the Iranians to cooperate.

Respecting Iran's "Rights"  
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17. (C) Nevertheless, Li maintained that Beijing believes that the "rights of Iran must be respected." Chinese policy-makers view the new Iran-IAEA Plan of Action as a positive step toward increased transparency and an indication of Iran's willingness to "clear up outstanding issues." Li stressed that Iran should be allowed to have small-scale enrichment activities for research purposes, as this does not violate international law, adding that Beijing is suspicious of the U.S. view that a nuclear India is acceptable but a nuclear Iran is not.

Nuclear weapon would decrease Iranian security  
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18. (C) Based on his conversations with Iranian officials, Li insisted, Iran does not, in fact, want to create a nuclear weapon. He cautioned, however, that this only represents his personal viewpoint. He claimed that Iran only seeks the technology to build a bomb as a form of deterrence, critical for regime survival as well as a key bargaining chip to use to reach Iran's fundamental goal of reestablishing relations with the United States. Iran understands that actually constructing a bomb, Li said, would dramatically weaken Iran's security position, isolating it from the rest of the world and possibly provoking a military response from the United States.

